ENHANCING LEARNING

Report of the Student Achievement Task Force

Faye Brownlie
Stewart Ladyman
Julie MacRae
Fred Renihan
Gail Sumanik
Rod Wickstrom, Chair

Submitted to:
Honourable Christy Clark
Minister of Education

February 2003

BRITISH COLUMBIA

Table of Contents

I.	Background	2
II	Current Status of Student Achievement in B.C.	4
III	Defining Student Achievement	8
	Alternative Approaches	
	Proposed Definition	
	Implications of the Definition	
IV	Factors Affecting Student Achievement	12
V	Concluding Comments	22
VI	Summary of Recommendations	23
VII	Appendices	
	Appendix A: Selected Sources: Student Achievement Data	27
	Appendix B: Selected References	28
	Appendix C: List of Submissions	30

ENHANCING LEARNING

Report of the Student Achievement Task Force

I. Background

The Student Achievement Task Force was established with an overall mandate to consult with B.C.'s education community and recommend ways to improve the achievement levels of all students in all areas of learning.

In September 2002, the Minister of Education, Hon. Christy Clark, announced the formation of a provincial Task Force on Student Achievement. She stated:

> We want to ensure our schools are giving students the knowledge and skills they need, and we know B.C .students can do better.... One challenge is that there is no commonly agreed-upon definition for achievement. There are also differing opinions of how to measure achievement, and best practices are not always shared among school districts. In order to develop a plan to improve student achievement, we need to ensure everyone involved with B.C.'s education system is talking about the same thing.

Any educational endeavour at this time takes place against a somewhat perplexing background. Over the past two decades, education has become increasingly recognized as a key element not only in personal development, but also in national economic performance. In addition, the complexity of modern life has necessitated increased levels of knowledge and skills in order for individuals to cope effectively with social and workplace demands. As a result, jurisdictions throughout Canada and the industrialized world are undertaking a variety of educational reform or renewal efforts with the objective of raising student achievement.

In British Columbia, educational improvement efforts have included the introduction of accountability contracts for school districts and school plans at the school level, each of which has raised questions from those involved about the meaning of student achievement, and the methods of measuring it.

These efforts also take place in a provincial context of difficult economic circumstances, with attendant financial stress on school districts and schools.

The Student Achievement Task Force was established with an overall mandate to "consult with B.C.'s education community and recommend ways to improve the achievement levels of all students in all areas of learning." The scope of this mandate can be better understood in the

context of the purpose of the school system in British Columbia, which is stated in the current provincial policy description of educated citizens:

...citizens who are:

- thoughtful, able to learn and to think critically, and who can communicate information from a large knowledge base;
- creative, flexible, self-motivated and who have a positive self-image;
- capable of making independent decisions;
- skilled and who can contribute to society generally, including the world of work;
- productive, who gain satisfaction through achievement and who strive for physical well-being;
- co-operative, principled and respectful of others regardless of differences;
- aware of the rights and prepared to exercise the responsibilities of an individual within the family, the community, Canada, and the world.

Statement of Education Policy Order (Mandate for the School System) OIC 1280/89

The Task Force was impressed with the positive, encouraging message which is provided concerning the achievement of B.C. students.

The specific responsibilities of the Task Force can be stated as:

1. To review current information on the achievement of B.C. students;
2. To develop a common definition for student achievement, applicable to all students in every area of learning, which could serve as a basis for improvement efforts;
3. To consider the available evidence from research and practice on the most promising means of improving student achievement; and,
4. On the basis of the above information, to make recommendations which could prove useful to the Ministry, teachers, schools, school districts, parents, students, educational leaders and organizations.

During the past months the Task Force has initiated an extensive review of available research on educational and student achievement, has conducted or participated in several forums concerning the issues, and has received oral and/or written submissions from a variety of individuals and groups, a list of which is included in the Appendix.

On the basis of this review and investigation, the Task Force now respectfully presents its report.

In 2002, 80% of provincial Grade 4 students met or exceeded expectations in reading comprehension, as did 94% in writing and 85% in numeracy. The scores had increased from 2001, when comparable results were 78% in reading, 91% in writing, and 84% in numeracy.

II. Current Status of Student Achievement in B.C.

In recent years, a number of efforts have been made to determine overall or average achievement of British Columbia students in a number of areas, some of which include comparative results with other jurisdictions. In reviewing the available data, the Task Force was impressed with the positive, encouraging message which is provided concerning the achievement of B.C. students.

The following is a very brief summary of several of those results. References to more detailed information are included the Appendix A.

Foundation Skills Assessments

The Foundation Skills Assessment is a set of written tests, unique to British Columbia, administered to Grades 4, 7, and 10 each year in May, in the areas of reading, writing, and numeracy. The tests are developed, marked and evaluated by B.C. teachers, are linked to the provincial Performance Standards, and provide information on the proportion of students who meet or exceed provincial standards. Results are available at the provincial, district, school, and individual student levels, and also identify several relevant groups of students. (All years indicated refer to the second year of the school year; e.g., 1997 refers to the 1996-97 school year).

1. In 2002, 80% of provincial Grade 4 students met or exceeded expectations in reading comprehension, as did 94% in writing and 85% in numeracy. The scores had increased from 2001, when comparable results were 78% in reading, 91% in writing, and 84% in numeracy.

2. Grade 7 results in 2002 were 76% meeting or exceeding expectations in reading, 84% in writing, and 82% in numeracy, compared to 76%, 81%, and 81% respectively a year earlier.

3. Grade 10 results in 2002 were 71% in reading, 87% in writing, and 76% in numeracy, compared to 75%, 86%, and 77% respectively in 2001.

4. In general, First Nations/Aboriginal students had smaller percentages meeting expectations than the provincial average. For example, in 2002, 56% met or exceeded expectations in Grade 4 reading, which was similar to the two previous years. In Grade 4 writing, significant gains were made with 77% meeting or exceeding expectations in 2001 compared to 84% in 2002.

5. Over the three years the FSA has been administered provincially improvement was seen in the provincial population in Grades 4 and 7 in Writing and Numeracy. In contrast, declines in overall performance were seen in Reading Comprehension for Grades 7 and 10.

The provincial proportion of B.C. youth completing Grade 12 in the six-year period has steadily increased from 70% in 1997, to 73% by 1999, and to 75% by 2001.

School Completion Rates

The school completion rate is defined as the percentage of Grade 8 students who graduate from Grade 12 within six years. This rate is calculated by tracking a group of Grade 8 students over a six-year period, and adjusting the rate for provincial out-migration.

1. The provincial proportion of B.C. youth completing Grade 12 in the six-year period has steadily increased from 73% in 1997 to 75% by 2001.
2. The completion rate for Aboriginal/First Nations students has increased dramatically from 34% in 1997, to 42 % in 2001.
3. In Quebec, the only other Canadian jurisdiction for which similar information is currently available, the probability of students in the youth sector and under 20 years of age obtaining a secondary school diploma was 72% in 2001.
4. According to statistics provided by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, 89% of the Canadian population aged 25-34 have completed upper secondary education. This is a proportion exceeded by only 6 of the 30 industrialized countries included in the study. While specific data for B.C. are not included, students in Canada evidently often complete the high school program later than six years after beginning Grade 8.

Grade 12 Examinations

Student performance on Grade 12 examinations in English 12 and Principles of Mathematics 12 has remained relatively constant over the years: between 1997 and 2001, the pass rate for the English 12 exam has varied from 87% to 91%, and from 82% to 85% for the Principles of Mathematics exam.

Satisfaction Survey

In March, 2002, more than 208,000 students, parents, and school staff members participated in a province-wide school satisfaction survey. Students and parents in Grades 4, 7, 10, and 12 were included.

In the 2000 Program for International Student Assessment, no country or province outperformed B.C. in reading.

Among the findings were:

1. 73% of parents are satisfied all of the time or many times with what their child is learning at school.
2. Combined responses of parents and students show general satisfaction with reading (70%), writing (67%), and mathematical (64%) skills development. However, the proportion of schools with high levels of overall student satisfaction falls as grade levels increase.

Student Achievement Indicators Program (SAIP)

The Council of Ministers of Education in Canada provides a program of periodic assessments of the achievement of randomly-selected 13- and 16-year old students across Canada, in areas of mathematics, science, and reading and writing. In the assessments conducted in 1998 (reading and writing) and in 1999 (science), B.C. students performed as well as or better than other Canadian students. In 2001, (mathematics), B.C. students performed similarly to Canadian students as a whole.

International Studies

In 2000, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) conducted the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) of 15-year-old students' skills in reading, science, and mathematics in 32 countries. No country or province outperformed B.C. in reading. Only Korea, Japan, Alberta and Quebec did better than B.C. in mathematics, and only Korea did better than B.C. in science. The study also indicates that achievement scores are more equivalent among Canadian students with different socio-economic backgrounds than they are in most other countries.

Results were similar in the 1999 Third International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS), which measured the performance of 13- and 14-year olds in 38 countries. The average performance of B.C. students in both areas was significantly higher than the international averages, and similar to the Canadian averages. Quebec was the only province with significantly higher mathematics scores than B.C., and Alberta was the only province with significantly higher science scores than B.C.

104-01823/

Summary

The outline of student achievement indicators in the previous section presents a favourable picture of student achievement in British Columbia. In general, the assessment information available indicates that B.C. students perform competitively with other Canadian students, and probably among the top 10-15% of students internationally.

In general, the assessment information available indicates that B.C. students perform competitively with other Canadian students, and probably among the top 10-15% of students internationally.

However, a number of limitations are also evident, including:

1. The range of areas on which data are available is noticeably incomplete, particularly when compared to the spectrum of school system goals identified in the description of the Educated Citizen;
2. Available information is based primarily on written tests or instruments, which, while valuable, do not necessarily capture the total achievements in attitudes, skills and knowledge in any given area;
3. The overall positive results for the majority of students cannot obscure the fact that many do not achieve at an adequate level;
4. Assessment data such as those presented provide a useful "snapshot" of overall achievement at a certain point in time, but are not sufficiently diagnostic nor individual to provide much assistance to students, teachers, schools or districts in improving achievement further;
5. The collection of such information on large populations does not account for varying "starting points" or improvement of individuals or groups.

Defining student achievement in terms of growth or increases in learning provides an approach related to the individual's or group's prior performance.

III. Defining Student Achievement

The Task Force recognizes the profound impact of an implicit or explicit definition of student achievement upon the type of assessment information gathered, and upon activities which may be undertaken to improve achievement. The appropriateness of developing a workable definition is therefore evident.

A. Approaches to Definition

At least five different approaches can be used in attempting to develop a definition of student achievement:

1. **Minimum standards or mastery:** This approach depends upon specifying a required level of attainment, which when obtained, is taken as evidence of satisfactory achievement by the individuals or group of students. Examples: "I passed the biology exam!" "Ninety % of the grade 4 students in the District met or exceeded the B.C. prescribed learning outcomes in reading." Since it is possible to vary the expected level of attainment for individuals or groups, this approach does not necessarily lead to "one size fits all."

2. **Eventual Success:** Achievement can also be defined in terms of long term or adult success, although this approach is rarely taken. "Our school has graduated four Governor-General's medallists in the past decade!" "Follow-up studies show that 75% of the province's grade 12 graduates are economically self-sufficient by age 25."

3. **Satisfaction:** A common measure of achievement uses the level of satisfaction obtained. "My child is very happy at school—that's what is important to me!" "A recent poll shows that 80% of parents feel that our schools are safe."

4. **Comparative Position:** The natural human inclination to judge ourselves against others is also evidenced in approaches to defining student achievement. "I just can't handle math as well as the others in my class." "On average, Canadian 15-year olds perform better than those from most other countries on measures of scientific understanding."

5. **Growth:** Defining student achievement in terms of growth or increases in learning provides an approach related to the individual's or group's prior performance. "Dale has become much more confident this year in expressing ideas through art." "In September, 25% of the

class met or exceeded expectations for social responsibility on the B.C. Performance Standards. By June, that had increased to 60%."

Each of the above approaches is evident in common use, and each can provide a legitimate "window" on student achievement. Each approach also presents inherent difficulties: minimum standards may provide no challenge for many students, and be quite unreachable for some with disabilities; eventual success is extremely difficult to determine, and is too remote from day-to-day school activities; satisfaction or pleasure may not indicate "real" learning; achievement may exceed that of others, but provide no satisfaction for those who cannot compete; and learning may indeed increase but still not reach an acceptable level.

Recognition of these possible approaches also makes evident the fact that the measure of student achievement provided in Section II of the report primarily represents a comparative approach, and relates to average group performance.

A useful definition of student achievement should be broad enough to encompass all areas of learning for all students, and provide a combination of approaches.

B. A Proposed Definition

The Task Force, following consideration of currently used achievement measures and the various approaches possible, has concluded that a useful definition of student achievement should be broad enough to encompass all areas of learning for all students, and provide a combination of approaches. No single theme was more commonly expressed in submissions to the Task Force than was the need for a broad definition of student achievement. This statement in the submission of the B.C. Teachers' Federation is illustrative:

> Teachers therefore feel strongly that students need to learn how to learn, need to explore their talents, and need to acquire the skills for participating as socially responsible citizens in a democracy. In short, teachers feel that students are best served by a broad liberal education of the sort envisioned in the government's current policy description of educated citizens.

The Task Force agreed with these expressed positions of the many persons and groups making submissions, and reached consensus on the following proposed definition of student achievement:

Student achievement is an improvement in learning that develops both the individual and the individual's ability to contribute to society.

In many important respects, achievements are the milestones on the learning journey between performance and potential.

The intent of our focus on student achievement is to ensure that:

- **Students' learning increases;**
- **British Columbia students attain identified standards in the areas of intellectual, human, social and career development;**
- **All students achieve regardless of life circumstances;**
- **Learning creates personal satisfaction and social responsibility.**

In many important respects, achievements are the milestones on the learning journey between performance and potential. Both performance and potential in this respect must include the appreciations, attitudes, skills and knowledge, and in the areas of:

- reading
- writing
- numeracy
- scientific literacy
- citizenship & social responsibility
- technological/informational literacy
- artistic literacy
- critical thinking and problem solving
- fitness & personal well-being
- education planning and employability skills

C. Implications of the Definition

The Task Force believes that a number of implications follow from this perspective, including:

- Evaluation of achievement requires a variety of assessment approaches;
- Measuring student improvement necessitates evaluation of the same area(s), for the same student(s), over time; and
- Application of minimum standards to most students may be appropriate, but "identified" standards will also be required for individual students at any point in time and in any given area of endeavour.

Several hypothetical scenarios may assist the reader to recognize how the proposed definition could be used in practice:

Scenario #1: Shawn Taylor, a Grade 5 teacher at Morton School, wanted to design the year's classroom program based on the needs of the students and grade level expectations. At the beginning of the school year, with assistance from another Grade 5 teacher, the principal and the resource teacher, Shawn reviewed the permanent record files, the FSA

results, the "Strengths and Areas Requiring Improvement" document, and collected reading, writing and numeracy samples, which were scored using Grade 5 B.C. Performance Standards. The samples were collected from a variety of contexts: independent work, teacher-directed work, and collaborative work. Using observational data and a check on the degree to which each student enjoyed reading, the teachers built a profile for each student, established class goals for each of the three areas, and conducted subsequent program planning from the individual and group goals. Students worked with Shawn to share their own and the class goals at the Parent Conference, a process that was repeated each term. Shawn was then able to report student progress to the parents, principal, and next year's teacher against beginning-of-the year baseline data, noting individual and group improvements and challenges.

The number and variety of factors that affect how well students learn are vast.

Scenario #2: Following receipt of considerable community concern about the behaviour of students at the District's two high schools, the School Board of District #103 requested a proposal for improvements from Superintendent Dana Miller. Dana initiated conversations with the principals, and subsequently with staff and the PACs. All agreed that action should be taken, and data gathering was devised to catalogue instances of several types of behaviours of each Grade 9 student over a 2-month period, as well as student attitudes toward behaviour. Simultaneously, an instructional program and school-wide emphasis was instituted, which was outlined in the annual school plan and district accountability contract. Similar data were gathered on the same students for each of the next two years, with feedback provided to each student and statistical summaries of overall changes included in reports to the community.

Scenario #3: Recognizing the need for attention to and assessment of a broader range of objectives than those covered by the Foundation Skills Assessment, the provincial Ministry undertook assessment development in two additional areas: attitudes toward learning, and critical thinking. With the assistance of teachers and university personnel, possible elements of each were identified.

These were made available to districts and schools for use where their particular plans and objectives made them appropriate. At the end of the next year, data were collected and collated from those locations where the assessment processes were used. Summaries of results were reported provincially, and used to develop "benchmarks" for the future.

Students' learning increases as they become able to plan, monitor and revise the strategies they are using in learning.

Recommendation 1: That the broad definition provided by the Task Force be accepted as the basis of instructional and assessment planning for student achievement.

IV. Factors Affecting Student Achievement

Consideration of means to improve the levels and quality of student achievement necessitates review of the factors that can affect learning.

The number and variety of factors that affect how well students learn are vast. The attitudes and determination of the students are of prime importance. But many external factors are also of great significance: a list could include such elements as quality of buildings and building environments, choice of schools, illness epidemics, medical services, community models, transportation services, and even the weather. Without diminishing the importance of any factors, the Task Force has chosen to concentrate attention on those influences that in the opinion of the Task Force, have the greatest significance in the present environment.

The selected factors are each supported by a wealth of evidence from research and best practice. The reader who wishes to investigate these factors further will find supportive references in Appendix B, but little attempt is made in the body of the report to reference items individually. The factors listed are not necessarily to be considered in priority order. The reader will also recognize that although factors are itemized separately, a substantial degree of overlap and inter-connectedness exists among them.

A. Instructional Factors

1. **Teaching processes:** No influence is more pervasive or significant on student learning than is the teaching process. Many submissions emphasized the major impact of the skills and passion of the teacher. Indeed, research evidence exists to indicate that appropriate instruction can substantially reduce any negative impact of other factors. While there are effective teaching processes specific to subject or skills areas, a number of generic elements common to all high-achievement classrooms can be identified from research and best practice. They include:

   - **Classroom management:** In a well-managed classroom, students are actively engaged in learning, and time is utilized effectively.

Engagement does not necessarily mean a quiet classroom, but rather one where students can be seen working alone and together on various tasks in a variety of ways. Expectations for what is to be learned and how it is to be demonstrated are developed with the students and made clear to all at the beginning of the learning sequence.

Learning increases when criteria for performance are explicitly established with and for students.

- **Student Learning Strategies:** Students' learning increases as they become able to plan, monitor and revise the strategies they are using in learning. Teachers work with all students to help them understand and to develop strategies for use in building understanding, and also to encourage their independent and appropriate use of those strategies.
- **Background Knowledge:** One of the most significant factors in learning new information is previous knowledge. Teachers must work with students to activate background knowledge, make connections with new and known information, and build motivation and curiosity before introducing new information.
- **Student and Teacher Positive Interactions:** Learning is enhanced when students work in a positive, safe environment where differences are prized and taking risks in learning is encouraged. Teachers focus on building collaborative learning communities with their students and on encouraging student talk about the content of the curriculum.
- **Feedback:** Learning increases when criteria for performance are explicitly established with and for students. Feedback on performance is as immediate as possible and is closely followed by an opportunity to use the feedback, with the goal of increasing students' ability to self-assess.
- **Expectations and challenge:** Students learn most effectively when high but achievable expectations are held for them individually and collectively. The learning situation should be as challenging, complex and relevant as required, with support available.

Recommendation 2: That all levels of the K-12 education system encourage focussed attention on the specific teaching/learning processes associated with increased student achievement.

Recommendation 3: That a Centre for the Promotion of Excellence in Teaching and Learning be established, with governance and

Increase the attention at all levels on "assessment for learning" as well as "assessment of learning."

financial participation of the Ministry, faculties of education, B.C. Teachers' Federation, B.C. Principals' and Vice Principals' Association, B.C. School Superintendents' Association, B.C. Confederation of Parent Advisory Councils and B.C. School Trustees Association. The purpose of the Centre would be to encourage, conduct, and disseminate research on teaching and learning processes, and to provide consultative service to districts and schools on a fee-for-service basis.

As stated earlier, one of the difficulties of concentrating on the overall positive achievement results for the majority of B.C. students, is that a significant number of students remain who do not achieve at an adequate level. Attention placed on this concern should be considered of utmost importance.

Recommendation 4: That priority be placed on improving the performance of under-achieving students.

2. **Curriculum:** Students are obviously most likely to learn what they are taught. A well-designed, relevant, coherent curriculum which is consistently taught, with a variety of suitable learning resources, is therefore of critical importance.

   The requirement for a relevant curriculum presupposes inclusion of those elements of knowledge, skills, and attitudes that all students may be assumed to need in order to be publicly useful. But it also requires flexibility that enables adjustment for individual needs and interests.

   Recommendation 5: That the Ministry continue to develop and maintain well-designed, relevant, and "teacher-friendly" curriculum guides and materials.

3. **Assessment:** Gathering of information on a student's learning may be considered to be of two types: assessment of learning, which provides overall data on the student or level of learning at a certain point in time; and assessment for learning, which provides diagnostic information enabling the teacher to focus on specific learning experiences the student needs to advance learning. While the two types of assessment are different, they are not necessarily separate. However, census-type data (i.e., assessment of data), which indicate only overall levels of achievement at the provincial, district, school or individual levels, for example, do not provide much information useful to a teacher in planning an instructional program.

It is of great importance that there be a wide variety of assessment techniques to meet the various learning objectives identified in the Definition section. The B.C. School Trustees Association, in its submission, describes the issue as follows:

—-the—-framework of —- categories (which we propose) encompasses many of the achievements that the BCSTA advocates for students: knowing, thinking, doing, creating, connecting, communicating, striving and caring.

It is almost a rule of thumb that the more important something is, the more difficult it is to measure.

Furthermore, most of those assessment techniques must be of a nature which provides assessment for data, and educators must have the skills to use that information effectively if an improvement in learning is the goal.

An additional comment must be made about the quantity of assessments which are undertaken. As indicated earlier, the effective use of time is a significant factor in learning, and the overuse of time for assessment of activities could, in fact, be dysfunctional.

Recommendation 6: That increased attention at all levels be placed upon "assessment for learning" while maintaining the current level of attention on "assessment of learning".

Recommendation 7: That the Ministry

maintain, but not increase, its present level of large-scale assessments and continue the practice of no large-scale provincial assessments in the primary years.

Recommendation 8: That

a. to the greatest degree possible, all Ministry assessments provide feedback at provincial, district, school and student levels;

b. reporting of such assessments be accompanied by a range of examples demonstrating how "assessment for learning" can be integrated into classroom practice and into planning of instructional work across age groups and across subjects; and,

c. provincial assessment results be provided in forms which encourage comparisons only among similar groups and individuals, and which follow groups of students over time.

To the greatest degree possible, all Ministry assessments provide feedback at provincial, district, school and student levels.

The need to handle language effectively is crucial to most areas of school achievement.

Recommendation 9: That

a. educators be encouraged to use the existing Performance Standards; and,

b. the Ministry develop and encourage the development of an array of additional Performance Standards and assessment approaches that can be used by districts and schools to assess the broad range of objectives contained in the proposed definition (Section III).

Recommendation 10: That district and provincial levels report on student achievement using data in various areas of human, social, and career development.

4. **Literacy:** The need to handle language effectively is crucial to most areas of school achievement. The evidence clearly indicates that some students do not attain an age-appropriate level of reading, writing, and speaking in the early years of school, and that this deficit often deepens over the years, with attendant achievement difficulties and feelings of inadequacy. Fortunately, there is reason to believe that early, appropriate, and continuing attention to literacy can resolve this problem for the vast majority of students.

   Recommendation 11: That a first priority in all district and school achievement plans be the early and continuing development of literacy.

   An important concept in this regard was contained in the Canadian Highlights from the PISA study:

   > A route to improving the average reading ability of youth in all of the provinces lies in improving reading skills among the economically or socially disadvantaged youth. (Measuring Up, p.5)

5. **Professional Development:** Considering the extent of necessary teacher knowledge and skill identified in the previous items, professional development focussed on these essential instructional processes is of major significance. Partly this need speaks to pre-service teacher preparation, but development needs continuous attention. For teachers in service, evidence exists that one of the most effective means of professional development is the creation of learning communities, where professionals can study, discuss, practice, gather data and critique teaching practices and programs for increasing effectiveness, particularly when focussing on student work.

Recommendation 12: That a primary focus of teacher development efforts at pre-service and in-service levels be the continuing development and refinement of exemplary teaching/learning practices.

Recommendation 13: That concentrated attention be placed upon creation of "learning communities" where professionals study, discuss, practice, gather data and critique teaching practices and programs, and that a significant proportion of professional development time be devoted to this approach.

Attention be placed upon creation of "learning communities" where professionals study, discuss, practice, gather data and critique teaching practices and programs.

The approaches described above are expressed in the submission of the B.C. Principals' and Vice-Principals' Association:

> We believe that redirecting the focus of measuring student achievement to individual students and individual learning communities will broaden the definition of student achievement to better reflect individual potential and growth. It will also reduce the comparisons between groups of students and schools, based on limited data.

Recommendation 14: That

a. the Ministry coordinate a website devoted to the exchange of successful instructional programs and best practices among districts and schools; and,

b. partner organizations regularly identify and report success stories and promising practices concerning student achievement.

B. Organizational Factors

1. Culture/Climate: Studies of organizations have long identified the culture or climate of an organization as a potent factor in enabling or disabling productivity among its members. A positive culture seems to apply to all kinds of organizations—public, private, voluntary—and at all levels and sizes. Several characteristics tend to predominate in productive cultures: common committed goals among members, a sense of belonging and personal value, availability of reasonably objective information on performance, and the ability to participate actively and cooperatively in the efforts of the organization. There is a feeling of genuine membership, trust, and recognition for contribution.

The above description can readily be applied in education at all

This characteristic of a common mission or vision deserves special mention.

levels— province, district, school, and classroom. One description from the research literature on effective schools illustrates the point:

> Overall, we found the atmosphere to be more pleasant in the effective schools, for a variety of reasons. Both around the school and within the classroom, less emphasis on punishment and critical control, and a greater emphasis on praise and reward was beneficial. Where teachers actively encouraged self-control on the part of pupils, rather than emphasizing the negative aspects of their behaviour, progress and development were enhanced. What appeared to be important was firm but fair classroom management. The class teachers' attitude to pupils was also important. Positive effects resulted where teachers obviously enjoyed teaching their classes, valued the fun factor, and communicated their enthusiasm to the children. Their interest in the children as individuals, and not just as learners, also fostered progress. Those who devoted more time to non-school chat or small talk increased pupils' progress and development. Outside the classroom, evidence of a positive climate included: the organization of lunchtime and after-school clubs for pupils; involvement of pupils in the presentation of assemblies; teachers eating their lunch at the same tables as the children; organization of trips and visits; and the use of the local environment as a learning resource. Thus, the climate created by the teachers for the pupils, and by the head (principal) for the teachers, was an important aspect of school effectiveness. This further appeared to be reflected in effective schools by happy, well-behaved pupils who were friendly towards each other and outsiders, and by the absence of graffiti around the school (Mortimore, pp. 255-256).

As part of the description of positive culture, the need for common goals was mentioned. This characteristic of a common mission or vision deserves special mention. The concept here is not simply a written mission statement, valuable though it may be, but of all organizational members having a common shared view of purpose, one that stimulates and enthuses. The possibility of such a shared vision of improvement in student achievement at any level of the education system is therefore an exciting notion.

Recommendation 15: That

a. all levels and all educational organizations recognize the importance of a positive educational climate and devote themselves to its development and improvement, and

b. the Minister and partners in education focus attention on improvement of the educational climate and the pursuit of our common mission at the provincial level.

Recommendation 16: That schools and communities find methods of recognizing achievement in all areas of student development.

Leaders who focus relentlessly on teaching and learning, and who work to minimize distractions from that focus, hold much promise for enhanced student achievement.

2. **Leadership:** Creating the environments in which the previously described positive attributes can come together requires positive and visible leadership. Leadership can of course arise from anywhere, and indeed is most effective when widely encouraged and distributed; however, formally designated leaders—the Minister and Ministry officials, district and school leaders— carry special responsibility. In particular, leaders who focus relentlessly on teaching and learning, and who work to minimize distractions from that focus, hold much promise for enhanced student achievement.

Recommendation 17: That the Ministry, educational partners, and district and school leaders commit to the provision of leadership for increasing student achievement as their major priority, and that government and school boards exert effort to support that direction and to minimize distraction from it.

C. Environmental Factors

The factors described to this point are to a great extent within the radius of influence of the educational community. Factors mentioned in this section are less so.

1. **Student Personal and Context Factors:** Students obviously come to school with individual personalities, talents, prior learnings, weaknesses, and motivations. Some early researchers on school effectiveness even suggested that home background and socio-economic status were such powerful influences on student achievement that the school could have little influence on the disparities in learning caused by that background. Later studies and common experiences have shown that conclusion to be untrue. Indeed, evidence suggests that if the factors identified above are influenced positively, early, and consistently, many of the effects of unfortunate life circumstances can be overcome.

The Ministry develop, with teachers and parents, clear curriculum guidelines for use by parents at home.

Nevertheless, those personal and context variables have a powerful influence on students. While educational personnel are clearly not in a position to lessen the consequences of many negative external variables, this discussion would be incomplete without mention of the importance of good foundational home and community influence: a safe and wholesome environment, healthful nutrition, and stimulating experiences.

Recommendation 18: That Government assess and support services to develop positive home and community influences for vulnerable children from early childhood onward.

2. **Parent Involvement:** Since parents carry the earliest and primary responsibility for children, the importance of their involvement in education is not surprising. Of particular note in research findings is the impact of parents' involvement in their own children's education—knowing what they are learning, assisting with homework, and helping them make wise program choices, are examples.

   The significance of parent involvement is emphasized in the submission of the B.C. Confederation of Parent Advisory Councils:

   > Research is conclusive that, when parents, teachers and principals work cohesively, children perform better in school. The perspective of each of the partners enhances the child's learning experience, setting a positive climate in which achievement can occur. Partnership must remain a focus of our efforts to serve our children, making their education a gateway to their future.

   Recommendation 19: That Parent Advisory Councils in cooperation with schools, focus attention on encouraging and developing means for parents to become involved in their own children's education.

   Recommendation 20: That the Ministry develop, with teachers and parents, clear curriculum guidelines for use by parents at home.

3. **Funding:** The research literature does not indicate a consistently high relationship between educational expenditures and educational achievement. In view of the current provincial financial scene, this is probably fortunate.

   However, a significant theme in many of the submissions concerned funding, and in particular the possible costs of implementing programs to enhance student achievement.

The Task Force acknowledges the many thoughtful suggestions provided in submissions, some of which, while legitimate, are probably not sustainable in the present economic climate. Other suggestions can be implemented without additional resources, and the Task Force has concentrated on such recommendations. Nevertheless, the concerns about funding should not be disregarded due to the impact of resources on the ability to provide teaching and support services, and on the prevailing climate in the schools.

Ministry and district leadership ensure existing financial resources are aligned as closely as possible with the primary purpose of improving student achievement.

Recommendation 21: That

a. Ministry and district leadership ensure existing financial resources are aligned as closely as possible with the primary purpose of improving student achievement; and,

b. as soon as additional resources become available, the Ministry provide districts with enhanced funding to enable provision of teaching, learning, and leadership conditions that can further enhance student achievement.

The goal that has motivated the Task Force is a future in which the vast majority of our students become truly educated citizens, meeting not only minimum expectations across the broad expanse of educational objectives, but also that each student reach their individual potential.

V. Concluding Comments

The creation of this Task Force attests to the interest of Government in the achievement of B.C. students. If further evidence were needed of the timeliness of the undertaking, it was provided by the significant participation of education partner groups, educators, trustees, parents, community members and students through forums and submissions.

The Task Force was also encouraged by the degree to which the topic of student achievement has captured the imagination and concern of so many groups. This interest was evidenced in many student achievement improvement efforts underway in various locations, and by the presence of this topic as a major item of discussion at conferences and meetings.

The data available on the level of average student performance in B.C. compared to other national and international jurisdictions is impressive. But the goal that underlies the interest in this topic, and which has motivated the Task Force, is much more extensive; it envisages a future in which the vast majority of our students become truly educated citizens, meeting not only minimum expectations across the broad expanse of educational objectives, but also that each student reach their individual potential.

The impediments to reaching such a goal are many: complex social problems, unfortunate student backgrounds, funding difficulties, inadequate knowledge base and skills, and of course the unwillingness or lack of motivation of some students, to name a few. While the Task Force believes the recommendations in this report have promise for moving student achievement to a higher level, many would say the challenging goal stated above is simply unattainable. Certainly no one should hold illusions about the complexities involved.

Yet the Task Force and many others in the province hold to that vision of a level and breadth of student achievement that would enable all to be described as truly educated citizens. And with the commitment of all who are involved, perhaps we will realize the power of such a vision!

VI. Summary of Recommendations

Definition:

Recommendation 1: That the broad definition provided by the Task Force be accepted as the basis of instructional and assessment planning for student achievement.

Teaching Processes:

Recommendation 2: That all levels of the K-12 education system encourage focussed attention on the specific teaching/learning processes associated with increased student achievement.

Recommendation 3: That a Centre for the Promotion of Excellence in Teaching and Learning be established, with governance and financial participation of the Ministry, faculties of education, B.C. Teachers' Federation, B.C. Principals' and Vice Principals' Association, B.C. School Superintendents' Association, B.C. Confederation of Parent Advisory Councils, and B.C. School Trustees Association. The purpose of the Centre would be to encourage, conduct and disseminate research on teaching and learning processes, and to provide consultative service to districts and schools on a fee-for-service basis.

Recommendation 4: That priority be placed on improving the performance of under-achieving students.

Recommendation 5: That the Ministry continue to develop and maintain well-designed, relevant, and "teacher-friendly" curriculum guides and materials.

Assessment:

Recommendation 6: That increased attention at all levels be placed upon "assessment for learning" while maintaining the current level of attention on "assessment of learning".

Recommendation 7: That the Ministry maintain, but not increase, its present level of large-scale assessments; and continue the practice of no large-scale provincial assessments in the primary years.

Recommendation 8: That

a. to the greatest degree possible, all Ministry assessments provide feedback at provincial, district, school and student levels;

b. reporting of such assessments be accompanied by a range of examples demonstrating how "assessment for learning" can be integrated into classroom practice and into planning of instructional work across age groups and across subjects; and,

c. provincial assessment be provided in forms which encourage comparisons only among similar groups and individuals, and which follow groups of students over time.

Recommendation 9: That

a. educators be encouraged to use the existing Performance Standards; and,

b. the Ministry develop and encourage the development of an array of additional Performance Standards and assessment approaches that can be used by districts and schools to assess the broad range of objectives contained in the proposed definition (Section III).

Recommendation 10: That district and provincial levels report on student achievement using data in various areas of human, social, and career development.

Literacy:

Recommendation 11: That a first priority in all district and school achievement plans be the early and continuing development of literacy.

Professional Development:

Recommendation 12. That a primary focus of teacher development efforts at pre-service and in-service levels be the continuing development and refinement of exemplary teaching/learning practices.

Recommendation 13: That concentrated attention be placed upon creation of "learning communities" where professionals study, discuss, practice, gather data and critique teaching practices and

programs, and that a significant proportion of professional development time be devoted to this approach.

Recommendation 14: That

a. the Ministry coordinate a website devoted to the exchange of successful instructional programs and best practices among districts and schools; and,

b. partner organizations regularly identify and report success stories and promising practices regarding student achievement.

Culture/Climate/Mission:

Recommendation 15: That

a. all levels and all educational organizations recognize the importance of a positive educational climate and devote themselves to its development and improvement, and,

b. the Minister and partners in education focus attention on improvement of the educational climate and pursuit of our common mission at the provincial level.

Recommendation 16: That schools and communities find methods of recognizing achievement in all areas of student development.

Recommendation 17: That the Ministry, educational partners, and district and school leaders commit to the provision of leadership for increasing student achievement as their major priority, and that government and school boards exert effort to support that direction and to minimize distraction from it.

Environmental Factors:

Recommendation 18: That Government assess and support services to develop positive home and community influences for vulnerable children from early childhood onward.

Recommendation 19: That Parent Advisory Councils in cooperation with schools, focus attention on encouraging and developing means for parents to become involved in their own children's education.

Recommendation 20: That the Ministry develop, with teachers and parents, clear curriculum guidelines for use by parents at home.

Recommendation 21: That

a. Ministry and district leadership ensure existing financial resources are aligned as closely as possible with the primary purpose of improving student achievement; and

b. as soon as additional resources become available, the Ministry provide districts with enhanced funding to enable provision of improved teaching, learning, and leadership conditions that can further enhance student achievement.

Appendix A

Selected Sources

Student Achievement Data

British Columbia

Foundation Skills Assessments

www.bced.gov.bc.ca/assessment/fsa/

Grade 12 Examinations

www.bced.gov.bc.ca/exams/standrep.htm

School Completion Rates

Report to BC Progress Board. B.C. Ministry of Education, Data Management Branch, 9 October, 2002.

Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development www.oecd.org "Education" — Education at a Glance, 2002 Edition

Satisfaction Survey

www.bced.gov.bc.ca/sat_survey

National/International

www.bced.gov.bc.ca/assessment/nat_int_assess.htm

Appendix B

Selected References

Allington, Richard L. "What I've Learned About Effective Reading Instruction." *Phi Delta Kappan* (June 2002): 740-747.

Black, Paul and Dylan William. "Inside the Black Box: Raising Standards Through Classroom Assessment." *Phi Delta Kappan* (October 1998): 139-148.

Donovan, M. Suzanne and James W Pellegrino (eds.). *How People Learn: Bridging Research and Practice.* Washington: National Academy Press, 2000.

Earl, Lorna, Nancy Watson and Nancy Torrance. "Front Row Seats: What We've Learned from the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategies in England." *Journal of Educational Change Vol. 3, No. 1* (2002): 1-20.

Gardner, Howard. "The Quality and Qualities of Educational Research." *Education Week on the Web* (4 September, 2002): 1-5.

Gewertz, Catherine. " 'Trusting' School Community Linked to Student Gains." *Education Week on the Web* (16 October, 2002): 1-5.

Gordon, David T. "Moving Instruction to Centre Stage." *Harvard Education Letter Research Online* (September/October, 2002): 1-6.

Henchey, Norman and others. *Schools That Make a Difference: Twelve Canadian Schools in Low-Income Settings.* Kelowna: Society for the Advancement of Excellence in Education, 2001.

Kaplan, Leslie S. and William A. Owings. "Teacher Quality and Student Achievement: Recommendations for Principals." *NASSP Bulletin Vol. 85, No. 628,* (November 2001): 1-5.

Matthews, Dona and Rosanne Menna. " Solving Problems Together: The Importance of Parent/School/Community Collaboration..." *Education Canada* (Winter 2003): 20-23.

Measuring up: The performance of Canada's youth in reading, mathematics, and science. OECD PISA Study—First Results for Canadians aged 15. Statistics Canada, 2002.

Mortimore, Peter and others. *School Matters.* University of California Press, 1988.

Raptis, Helen and Thomas Fleming. "Effective Instruction Part I: General Findings from Research. Victoria: Unpublished report, 2002.

Raptis, Helen and Thomas Fleming. "What Contributes to Effective Schools? "Part 1: Literature Review:1982-2002." Victoria: Unpublished report: 1-17.

"Part 2: Eight Characteristics of Effective Schools." Victoria: Unpublished report: 1-29.

Schmoker, Mike. "Lifting Low Performance." *Journal of Staff Development* (Spring 2002): 10-13.

Schacter, John. *The Impact of Education Technology on Student Achievement: What the Most Current Research Has to Say.* Milken Exchange on Education Technology, 2000. www.milkenexchange.org

Scheerens, Jaap and Roel Bosker. *The Foundations of School Effectiveness.* Oxford and New York: Elsevier Science Inc., 1997.

Senge, Peter M. *The Fifth Discipline: The Art and Practice of the Learning Organization.* New York: Doubleday, 1990.

"Strategies for School System Leaders on District Level Change: Taking on the 'All Means All' Challenge." *Strategies, Vol. 8., No. 2* (November 2001) Panasonic Foundation.

Sudlow, Robert E. (Reviewer). "Home-School Relations." *Effective Schools Research Abstracts, 1991-92 Series, Vol. 6, No. 2.*

Wang, M.C., G.D.Haertel and H.J. Walberg. "What Helps Students Learn?" *Educational Leadership, Vol. 51, Issue 4* (December 1993-January 1994): 74-80

Waterman, Robert H., Jr. *The Renewal Factor.* Toronto: Bantam Books, 1987.

Wideman, Ron. "Using Action Research and Provincial Test Results to Improve Student Learning." *Int. Electronic J. for Leadership in Learning, Vol .6, No. 20* (September 2002). www.ucalgary.ca/~iejll

Appendix C

List of Oral and/or Written Submission

Abbotsford Administrators' Association

Apps, Patty

Beresford, Charley

Brear, David

Beairsto, Bruce

Bowman, Jim

B.C. Confederation of Parent Advisory Councils

B.C. Directors of Special Education

B.C. Federation of Labour Education Committee

B.C. School Trustees Association

B.C. Principals' and Vice-Principals' Association

B.C. Teachers' Federation

Buchholz, Ken

Burgess, Lyse

Cambridge, Jim

Canadian Education Resources Council

Chambers, Dick

Chisholm, MaryEllen

Clarkson, J. D.

Clyne, Dave

Couch, Kathy

Dowd, Debi

Family Network for Deaf Children

First Nations Education Steering Committee

Fort Nelson School District # 81

George, Bev

Gore, Gordon

Gray, Larry

Gulf Islands School District # 64

Hanna, Sharon H.

Jackson, Melanie

Janzen, Ernie

Jones, J. T.

Kaldal, Ken

Kapusta, V.

Kelowna S. D. Career Preparation Program

Kelowna Literacy Program

Kinsey, Alison

Koole, R.

Koop, Val

Krawczyk, A. J.

Leadbetter, Ross

Lower Mainland Directors of Special Education

Ludditt, Karin

Maple Ridge Pitt Meadows School District # 42

Marler, Marilyn

Merritt Senior Secondary Parent Advisory Council

Middleton, Renee

Mieras, Maureen

Mynhardt, Johan

Nazko School Parent Advisory Committee

Pendharkar, M.

Player, Doug

Richter, Laura

Scott, Bev

Spilsbury, Candace – SD #79 Cowichan Valley

Society for the Advancement of Excellence in Education

Southern, Lee

Special Education Partners Group

Steele, Dawn

Stein, Bali B.

Student Voice

Surrey S.D. Parent Advisory Council

Usher, Jane

Vancouver Inner City Parents Group

Vancouver Island Network

Vancouver School District # 39

Victoria School-Based Program Coalition

Visscher, Kevin

Wilkins, Carol

Winstanley, John

Young, John

* Note: A number of other brief submissions were received that were anonymous or the sender was not identifiable.